Eunapius

(c. 347 – c. 420)

BRIEFING

Eunapius (Greek: Εὐνάπιος; c. 347 - c. 420) was a Greek sophist, rhetorician, and historian from Sardis in the region of Lydia in Asia Minor. His principal surviving work is the *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists* (Ancient Greek: Βίοι Φιλοσόφων καὶ Σοφιστῶν; Latin: *Vitae sophistarum*), a collection of the biographies of 24 philosophers and sophists.

LIFE

He was born at Sardis, around the year 347 AD. While still a youth, he went to Athens, where he became a pupil of Prohaeresius the rhetorician. Back in his native city he studied under his relative, the sophist Chrysanthius. He as well possessed considerable knowledge of medicine.

In his later years, he seems to have lived at Athens, teaching rhetoric. He was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries by the last Hierophant, Nestorius. There is evidence that he was still living in the reign of Theodosius II as he mentions an event that happened in 414 AD. The exact date of his death is unknown but speculated around 420 AD.

WRITING

Eunapius was the author of two works, one entitled *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists*, and *Universal History* consisting of a continuation of the history of Dexippus. The former work is still extant; of the latter only the Constantinian excerpts remain, but the facts are largely incorporated in the work of Zosimus. It embraced the history of events from AD 270–404.

The *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists*, a collection of the biographies of 24 older and contemporary philosophers and sophists, is valuable as the only source for the history of the (mostly neoplatonic) pagan philosophy of that period. The style of both works is marked by a spirit of bitter hostility to Christianity. Photius had before him a "new edition" of the history in which the passages most offensive to Christians were omitted.

The *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists* consists of the biographies of the following philosophers and sophists: Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Aedesius the Cappadocian, Maximus, Priscus, Chrysanthius, Epigonus, Beronicianus, Julian of Cappadocia, Prohaeresius, Epiphanius, Diophantus the Arab, Sopolis, Himerius, Parnasius, Libanius, Acacius, Nymphidianus, Zeno of Cyprus, Magnus, Oribasius, Ionicus, and Theon.